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Fritz Saaby Pedersen in memoriam

Part 1

by Sten Ebbesen, Saxo Institute, Copenhagen, editor of CIMAGL

Dr Saaby Pedersen (18 August 1945 – 16 March 2016), Fritz to most of his acquaintances, was one of the most learned men in Denmark. The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters acknowledged the fact by making him a fellow in 2001. By then he was already a member of The Danish Society for Language and Literature since 1983 and of the Académie Internationale d'Histoire des Sciences since 1999.

Saaby Pedersen was a classicist by training (M.A. 1970, Ph.D. 1976, both degrees from the University of Copenhagen). From 1978 till his retirement in 2007 he taught classics at the University of Odense (now called University of Southern Denmark). He was not only a first rate classicist in the traditional sense, his learning also included large areas of both contemporary and historical mathematics, astronomy and philosophy, Western –and in particular Danish– literature plus quite a few more things.

Among Danish scholars, Saaby Pedersen was a pioneer in the use of computer technology; indeed his first publication in this journal was a computer supported analysis of variants in the manuscripts of Boethius of Dacia's *De summo bono* (CIMAGL 14 [1975] 27-39).

Saaby Pedersen's scholarly output is of a moderate size if one just counts publications –some sixty titles in 47 years–, but it is that of a heavy-weight scholar who did not commit anything to print before he had done a most thorough investigation of the topic, forming a clear idea of what he wanted to achieve, checking every possible source (but also omitting from the publication anything that turned out to be not directly relevant to its particular aim), making sure every reference was correct, giving brief, but impeccably correct and sufficient information about his sources, procedures etc. His information-dense prose is that of a mathematician rather than typical humanist writing, and, indeed, in his early youth he had had difficulties in making up his mind whether to study mathematics or classics.

Saaby Pedersen's 1976 Ph.D. dissertation was about qualifications for public office in the late ancient Roman empire, but about the time he was finishing the dissertation Jan Pinborg († 1982), director of the Institute for Greek and Latin Medieval Philology (*IGLM*) and editor-in-chief of *Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi (CPhD)*, persuaded him to take upon himself the task of editing the writings of the Danish astronomer Peter Philomena (ca. 1290) for *CPhD*, and he started in his typical methodical way to work his way into what was to become his main field of research, medieval astronomy.

Pinborg arranged for Saaby Pedersen to have an office in *IGLM*, and for the next three decades he was a fixture of the institute and its successors (Institute for Greek and Latin 1992-2004, Saxo Institute 2004-), usually arriving late in the afternoon when most of the academic staff was about to leave for their hearths, and working till midnight. He would not, however, be alone in the late hours, as there would always be some hard-working students in the library and often equally hard-working foreign scholars on a visit to the institute. Several of the foreigners became his friends, and would both then and later benefit from his generous assistance in scholarly matters. The students –the smarter of them, at least– found out that they had a fountain of wisdom among them, a man whom they could ask for good advice about anything concerning Greek or Latin, and even study-unrelated matters.

As a preliminary step toward the edition of Peter Philomena, Saaby Pedersen helped the Aarhus historian of science Olaf Pedersen (1920-1997) put in order and publish his observations about the transmission of Peter's works. The result was published in *CIMAGL* 19 (1976) 1-54 (Olaf Pedersen, 'Petrus Philomena de Dacia: A Problem of Identity. With a survey of the manuscripts') without any acknowledgment of Saaby Pedersen's role in the publication. That was typical, it often took a fight to be allowed to mention his contribution to one's work.

The next step was issuing two trial editions, one of a text by Peter Philomena in *CIMAGL* 25 (1978), another of one by Peter of Saint-Omer, with whom the Danish Peter had often been confused, in *CIMAGL* 33 (1979).

The final step was the 1983-84 *CPhD* edition in two volumes, containing the works of both Peters. The two volumes are a mine of information

about late 13th-century works on mathematics and astronomy, with over two hundred manuscripts used!

There being no more Danish astronomers to edit, Saaby Pedersen threw his energy into investigating the transmission of the so-called Toledan tables, once again meticulously studying an incredible number of manuscripts and issuing preliminary studies and editions such as ‘Scriptum Iohannis de Sicilia super canones Azarchelis de tabulis Toletanis’ in *CIMAGL* 51 (1986) 1-128 and *CIMAGL* 52 (1986) 1-268. Finally, in 2002 he crowned his work on the tables with the 4-volume mammoth *The Toledan Tables. A review of the manuscripts and the textual tradition with an edition*.

As I am not myself competent in the history of medieval astronomy, I leave further evaluation of Saaby Pedersen’s contribution to the development of this scholarly discipline to one who is. Please see Philipp Nothaft’s assessment in part 2 of this obituary.

In his later years, Saaby Pedersen continued to work intermittently on medieval astronomy, but most of his time was spent on [1] assisting editors of all sorts of texts, ranging from medieval theological treatises to the letters of the Danish archaeologist Georg Zoëga (1755-1809), and [2] translating Plato into Danish. Saaby Pedersen was not much of a public speaker, but he had an unsurpassed command of written Danish, so his translations combine precision in rendering the philosophical message with precision in choosing the right sort of Danish to match the elegance of Plato’s Greek.

I have lost an intimate friend of half a century, this journal has lost one of its main contributors through four decades, the world at large has lost a great scholar.

Part 2

by Philipp Nothaft, All Souls College, Oxford

With Fritz Saaby Pedersen, the international scholarly community loses a philologist of rare technical skill, whose studies and critical editions of medieval Latin texts will continue to bear witness to their author's profound erudition, sedulity, and diligence. Although a multifaceted scholar with a broad range of interests, Pedersen will be remembered best for his numerous contributions to the study of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin astronomy. When he first entered this technically challenging area of research in the second half of the 1970s, mathematical astronomy, although represented in thousands of manuscripts, was a seriously neglected aspect of medieval intellectual culture, owing not least to an almost complete lack of adequate critical editions. Pedersen's efforts to rectify this situation were initially focussed on Peter of Dacia, also known as Peter Philomena, whom he was to refer to as "the only Danish mathematician and astronomer of any repute during the Middle Ages." Like his namesake Peter of Saint-Omer, Peter Nightingale was active in Paris during the 1290s and made contributions to a variety of astronomical sub-fields, including the construction of so-called *equatoria*—analogue computers used to calculate planetary positions. Pedersen's efforts to unearth and reconstruct the complete corpus of astronomical and mathematical writings attributed to the two Peters culminated in 1983–1984 with a two-volume edition published as part of the *Corpus Philosophorum Danicorum Medii Aevi*. At 860 pages of Latin texts prefaced by extensive introductions in English, the work soon came to be admired by colleagues as a model of scholarly scrupulousness and diligence. This diligence is on particularly strong display in Pedersen's treatment of Peter of Dacia's astronomical *Kalendarium*, which confronted its editor with a highly complex, uneven, and fragmented manuscript transmission. Pedersen mastered the task with the aid of a carefully laid out methodology, which involved the invention of an intricate system of sigla and abbreviations to sort and classify the textual and paratextual material preserved in more than 80 codices.

Pedersen was to employ the same methods on an even greater scale for his four-volume edition of *The Toledan Tables*, the publication of which

in 2002 represents the crowning achievement of his career as a researcher. Originally created by Andalusian astronomers in the late eleventh century for the purpose of computing planetary longitudes, the Toledan Tables underpinned most of the mathematical astronomy practiced in Latin Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth century, making their study indispensable for an understanding of the history of science in this period. As with Peter of Dacia's *Kalendarium*, Pedersen here managed to bring order into an astonishingly complex jumble of manuscripts, which involved both numerical tables and explanatory texts, also known as canons. His imposing 1662-page edition of the Toledan Tables and their various canons was based on more than 160 such manuscripts, from which he reconstructed and visually displayed some 470 individual tables while describing many more. Staying true to his all-inclusive approach to scholarly editing, Pedersen's work offered readers not only a detailed key to the Toledan Tables in all their different forms of appearance, but also to various cognate texts and tables, making his edition a treasure trove of information and indispensable starting point for other researchers.

It is a truism among historians that producing critical editions is the best guarantee for leaving a lasting imprint on one's field. In the case of Fritz Pedersen's editions of astronomical texts and tables, this holds true in more than just the ordinary sense, as many avenues of research today could not even be entered, let alone travelled, without the guidance his work has offered, and will continue to offer, to scholars throughout the world.

Part 3. Saaby Pedersen's publications

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